Iraq

Location

The nation of Iraq is located in the Middle East, and it covers 437,072 sq km. It is slightly more than twice the size of Idaho. The country is located at 33 00 N, 44 00 E coordinate. It has 1458 km long borders with Iran on the east, with Turkey 352 km long on the north, with Syria 615 km, and Jordan 818 km, and 814 km long with Saudi Arabia on the west and finally 240 km with Kuwait on the south. Iraq has access to international waters being located at the head of the Persian Gulf on the south with a 58 km coastline. In addition, there is a zone called the neutral shared by Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the south of Iraq, and Iraq provides 3522 sq km of this area.

Geography

Iraq has four geographic regions. The northeastern region, which has mountains, is called al-Jazira, and they reach a height of 2135m (7000 feet) near the Turkish border. In this region, are Iraq’s two highest points, which are Haji Ibrahim which is 3600m (11,811 feet) in height and Mount Halgurd which is 3,728m (12,320 feet) in height. The second region is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and it’s alluvial plain and Iraq’s most fertile region. The third is the southeast region, which is adjacent to the Persian Gulf. This area is a low-lying, swampy area, and has marshes, lakes and ready waterways. This is a flooding region in Iraq. Finally, the fourth region is the desert region, which is located on the west of the Euphrates River. This region joins the Syrian Desert and covers about 35% of Iraq’s total land area.

Tigris and Euphrates are Iraq’s two main rivers. They flow from northwest to southeast, and meet each other near Baghdad, the capital, and then they diverge and meet again about 160 km north of the Persian Gulf, and this forms the Shatt-al-Arab River. The Shatt-al-Arab River flows its way through Basra and drains into
the Gulf. The soils are very light and non-fertile with the exception of the soils between Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Climate

The climate differs largely from the north to the south. There are hot summers in the south and cold winters in the north especially in the mountainous regions. Summers are cooler in the mountainous regions of the north and humidity is lower than in the south. Snowfall is common during the winter in the north.

The temperature is much higher in the central regions during summers. In Baghdad, the temperature rises to about 33.3 °C in July and August. The mean temperature in Baghdad during the winter is about 9.4 °C. In Basra, a major city, the temperature is 37 °C in the summer and 14 °C in the winter. Dust storms occur in the central region.

The southern part around the Persian Gulf has very high humidity and some of the highest temperatures seen anywhere in the world. Heaviest rainfall occurs mostly between October and May in the northeastern region. Rainfall in the central region is about 152 mm annually. The desert area has almost no rainfall.

History

The country had one of the earliest civilizations in the world. Some evidence shows that the civilization in this region even began before Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The civilization began in Mesopotamia, which is the territory between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The earliest civilization is called Summer, which began about 3500 BC. After Sumerians the country was controlled by Babylonia and Assyria. Cyrus the great empire of Persia took control of the region in 539 BC. The region remained as a part of Persia until a Macedonian king, Alexander the Great occupied the land in 331 BC. After Alexander’s death, the Greek Seleucid dynasty ruled Mesopotamia for about 200 years. In 126 BC Parthian gained control of Iraq. In 126 AD again the country was taken control by Sassanid dynasty in Persia. In 637 AD Arabs overthrew the Sassanid dynasty and took control of the region. They brought Arabic language and Islam to Iraq. They built two new cities in Iraq.
named Al-Kufah near ancient Babylon and Al-Basra in the south. Abbasid’s dynasty came to power in 750 AD, and they founded Baghdad as their capital. During this dynasty, Baghdad grew and became the center of trade and culture. In 1258 AD Mongols occupied Iraq and destroyed the Abbasid dynasty. Mongols destroyed much of Baghdad and the city lost its important role of trade and culture in the region, and Tabriz, Northwest of Iran, which was a base for Mongols, replaced Baghdad and became the center of trade and politics. In the early 1500s the Ottoman Empire took over power in Iraq. This empire was a Sunni empire and ruled a big territory including Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Hejaz in this region. This empire lasted until World War I. During World War I the British Empire gained control of the region and defeated the Ottoman Empire. Iraq declared its independency in 1932, as a kingdom. In 1958, army officers overthrew the government and Iraq became a republic. Afterwards some military men ruled the country which Saddam being the last one. Saddam started an eight year-war with Iran in 1980; then he occupied Kuwait in 1990 and was expelled by US-led coalition forces in 1991. In 2003, the United States forces occupied Iraq and removed Saddam from power.

Important Dates

Important dates in Iraq are either religious or national ones. They are as follow:

First day of Islamic Year (First of Moharram), Muharram 10-Ashura (The son of Imam Ali, religious leader after Mohammad, was Killed), 12th Rabi al-Awwal-The birth date of Muslims prophet, Mohammad, Ramadan first-Ramadan begins, Shawwal first-Eid-ol-Fatr (End of Ramadan celebration), and The holiday of Id al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice honors Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Issac, which is on the 10th of Dhu al Hijjah, the 12th month of the year.

The national dates are January 1st (New Year), January 6th (Army Day), February 14th (Ramadan Revolution), March 21st (Nu Ray, Beginning of spring), May first (Labor Day), and August 18th (Peace Day).

Population
Based on an estimate in July, 2004, the population was approximately 25 million people. Forty point three percent of the population is under 14 years old, 56.7% is between 15 and 64, and 3% is over 64. The population growth rate is 2.74%, and there are 33.09 births per 1000 population and 5.66 deaths per 1000 people. There is 1.02 males per each female, and life expectancy is 68.02 years. Seventy five to eighty percent of the population is Arabs, 15%-20% are Kurds, and 5% are Turkoman, Assyrian or other. The literacy rate is 40.4% of the population. This indicates the rate of population over 15 years old, who can read and write.

**Currency**

As of January 2004, the currency is New Iraqi Dinar (NID). 1460 NID is equal to one US dollar. There are 10000 and 25000 of NID notes now, and other notes are being developed.

**Education**

Education is free in Iraq and Iraq has one of the highest standards in education in the Middle East. During the UN sanction, the education system was in crisis regarding budget and teachers. In 1990s the teachers were paid about 3$ a month, and it’s raised now to about 250$ a month. There are 26 universities in Iraq, and there were 90,000 enrollments for higher education in 2003. The famous universities are Sallahaddin University and University of Sulaimany.

**Language**

Arabic is the official language of Iraq. Kurdish is the official language in the northern part of the country. Despite English, Arabic is written from right to left and it has 28 letters. Arabic is divided to two types Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Classical Arabic is the Quran’s language, and it’s different from Modern Arabic in style and vocabulary. Modern Standard Arabic is the language that is used in Arabic speaking countries. Since Saddam was overthrown by the US, Kurdish has become an official language too and it’s going to be taught and written in Kurdish regions. English is the most commonly western language in
Iraq. Other languages such as Farsi, Assyrian, and Armenian are also spoken in Iraq.

**Religion**

Ninety seven percent of Iraqi’s are Muslims, of which 60% to 65% is Shi’a and 32% to 37% is Sunni. Three percent of the people are Christians or have other religions. The Saddam regime limited the freedom of religions in Iraq, but now based on new constitution of Iraq, people have freedom to practice their own religion.

**Agriculture**

The main agricultural region in Iraq is located between two main rivers, which have fertile soils. Agricultural products in 2002 were wheat, barely, and rice. Before the UN sanction over Iraq, exports of dates from Iraq was a major contribution to the world date trade. Iraq supplies almost 15% of the world’s dates. Other fruit products are apples, figs, grapes, olives, oranges, pears, and pomegranates.

Almost 10% of the country is good for grazing. There were 1.1 million cattle, 6.1 million sheep, 1,350,000 million goats, and 19 million poultry animals in 2000. Moreover, the world famous Arabian horse is bred in Iraq.

**Trade**

Oil is the major export of Iraq. Ninety five percent of Iraq’s export is oil. Other exports include dates and some other agricultural products. The economy mainly depends on the oil industry, and Iraq is one of the richest countries in oil. The country’s main export partners are the U.S, Taiwan, Canada, Jordan, Netherlands, and Italy.
Iraq’s imports are food, medicine, manufactures items, and technology. Iraq’s main import partners are Jordan, France, China, Vietnam, Germany, Russia, Australia, Italy, and Japan.

**Food**

Iraqi food is diverse. People add some spices such as saffron and mint to the foods. Popular meats in Iraq are lamb, beef, goat, mutton and poultry. Iraqi meat dishes are combined with vegetable and rice. There are two types of rice in Iraq; Amber rice in the north, neggaza in the south. Other popular foods are *Kebabs*, *Quiz*, which is roasted and stuffed lamb, and *Kubba*, which is minced meat with nuts, raising and spices. There’s a special dish called *Masgouf*, which is made from fish from the Tigres River. *Tripe* is made from cow’s stomach, which is also popular. People in the dessert make rice pudding, Turkish delight, and sesame cookies, are a cookie made with honey and pistachios layered between filo sheets.

Coffee and tea are the most popular drinks in Iraq. Arabic coffee is famous because of its strong flavor. In Iraq, people serve coffee bitter and black. Tea is usually served in small glasses and is sweetened. Iraqis don’t add milk to their tea. Fruit juices and soft drink are also served.

**Landmarks**

The Arch at Ctesiphon is one of the tallest arches in the world. It’s the remaining part of a 1,400-year-old royal palace. This arch is located on the outskirts of Baghdad. Another interesting site is National Museum of Baghdad. This museum has the world’s most magnificent collection of Mesopotamian antiquities, and thousands of clay tables. Unfortunately, people looted this museum after the US gained control over the country.

Nineveh, the city mentioned in the Bible and the third capital of Assyria, was one of the oldest cities in the world. Another site is Nimrud, which was home of the Assyrian Royal Palace. Tombs of Assyrian queens and princesses were discovered in Iraq in 1989.
Erbil, which is an ancient town, has 5,000 years of history. It consists of layered towns that were built one on top of the other over thousands of years.

Major religious center of the south is Nipur, and it has Samarian and Babylonian temples.

Finally Ur is the world’s first city and was built about 3500 BC. It has the most beautiful temple in the world. It was damaged in the Persian Gulf War by coalition forces.

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